

## Story Summary

*Beep! Beep!* go the taxis. *Voof!* go the velvet curtains. *The Nutcracker* ballet and New York City's David H. Koch Theater come to life in this onomatopoeic representation of a little girl's experience at the ballet. From the swish of her dress and the tick-tick-tick of the conductor's baton to the twelve bongs of the clock and the pitter-patter of dancers' feet, this

special evening is filled with sensory treats for the eyes and especially the ears. And did she enjoy the ballet? The answer is a big smooch on her father's cheek.

**Mireille Messier** hails from Ottawa but calls Toronto home. Her picture book *The Branch* was shortlisted for the Ontario Library Association's Blue Spruce Award in 2018. In addition to her career in books, Mireille has also worked as a voiceover artist and as a screenwriter for children's television. She enjoys flexing her creative muscles in both English and French.

**Gabrielle Grimard** transformed her love of design into a career in illustration over the course of her studies at Concordia University and the University of Quebec. In 2018, Gabrielle's picture book *Stolen Words* won the Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children's Book Award and was a finalist for the TD Canadian Children's Book Award. *Not My Girl* was a USBBY Outstanding International Book. Her creativity has been applied to children's publishing, advertising, and educational contexts.

## Links:

New York City Ballet—George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker*:  
<https://www.nycballet.com/Videos/Nutcracker/Nutcracker-Excerpt-Flowers-LeCrone.aspx>

## Pair this book with:

A picture book that tells the story of the Nutcracker such as *The Nutcracker* by Susan Jeffers or *Nutcracker* by E.T.A. Hoffmann and illustrated by Maurice Sendak.

Picture Book Ages 3–7 | ISBN: 978-1-77278-091-8 | Pages: 40

## THEMES

Traditions and Celebrations, Music, Performance

## BISAC CODES

JUV017010 JUVENILE FICTION / Holidays & Celebrations / Christmas & Advent

JUV031060 JUVENILE FICTION / Performing Arts / Theater

JUV013060 JUVENILE FICTION / Family / Parents

JUV039090 JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / New Experience

## READING LEVEL

Lexile Measure: AD480L | Fountas & Pinnell: K

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Reading Comprehension; Language—writing a personal narrative; Music—music history, composition, terminology; The Arts—audience skills; Social Studies, History, Geography—traditions, mapping

**THIS GUIDE CONTAINS:**

ACTIVITY	MAIN SUBJECT AREA	SPECIFIC SKILLS AND TOPICS
Read-Aloud	Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activate prior knowledge</li> <li>• Infer, predict, make connections</li> </ul>
That Sounds like a Story!	Language <i>Optional: Media Literacy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Word choice (onomatopoeia)</li> <li>• Writing a personal narrative</li> <li>• Create a media work</li> </ul>
Composers: Inspiring and Aspiring	Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Music history</li> <li>• Create a musical composition</li> <li>• Terminology: “Crescendo”</li> </ul>
Showing our Appreciation	The Arts: Dance, Drama, Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audience Skills</li> </ul>
Nutcracker’s Travels	Social Studies, History, Geography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditions</li> <li>• Mapping Skills</li> </ul>

**THE READ-ALoud**

This succinct book is best read with minimal interruption, so suggestions are given here for pre-reading discussion and for brief further discussion at only a few key points within the story.

**Learning expectations:**

Students will:

- identify reading comprehension strategies (e.g., activate prior knowledge, infer, predict, make connections) and use them before, during, and after reading to understand texts
- identify a variety of text features and explain how they help readers understand texts (varied fonts)

**You Will Need**

- *Nutcracker Night*
- a picture book that tells the story of the Nutcracker such as *The Nutcracker* by Susan Jeffers or *Nutcracker* by E.T.A. Hoffmann, illustrated by Maurice Sendak
- access to a live or video performance of *The Nutcracker*
- card stock and felt markers
- (optional) “Nutcracker Paper Doll” template blackline master, included below
- internet access

## How To:

### Before Reading

Activate students' prior knowledge by showing the cover, reading the title, and allowing students to volunteer anything they already know about *The Nutcracker*. Do the title, the Christmas tree, and the doll the girl is holding make them think of a story they've heard before? If someone knows that *The Nutcracker* is a performance, does the girl's clothing lead them to a prediction of what is going to happen in the story? Has anyone attended a performance of *The Nutcracker*? What was that like? After a few minutes of discussion, proceed to read the book, using lots of expression on the large-font words, showing wonder and anticipation in your voice, and lingering long enough on each page to allow students to take in the entire illustration.

### During Reading

**First twelve spreads:** Read expressively without comment.

**Thirteenth spread:** Read excitedly, "It's intermission!" Ask, "What happens during intermission?" Invite students to identify what the sound words represent as you read them. This brief discussion will mimic the way in which the actual intermission temporarily suspends the "spell" of a performance.

**Fourteenth spread:** Read, "Ding! ding! ding! goes the bell." Ask, "What does that mean?" (Return to seats). Convey with your body language that we are about to re-enter the "spell" of the performance.

**Fifteenth to seventeenth spreads:** Read expressively without comment.

**Eighteenth spread:** After reading ask, "What was the girl's answer to her Dad's question?"



### AFTER READING

Allow a few comments, then flip back to the beginning. Draw students' attention to the varied use of fonts. Ask, "Why might the author have done this?" Turn to the tenth spread ("Bong! Bong!"): Ask, "What do you notice about the way the author wrote these words? Why do you think she did that? When a sound gets louder and louder like that, it's called a crescendo." Invite students to read the words, crescendoing along with you. After reading, ask if anyone has questions or comments about what happened on this page. Turn to the sixteenth spread and invite comments and questions. (In this context, *polichinelles* are child dancers who are hiding under the enormous skirt of Mother Ginger and come out to perform a dance.) Turn to the seventeenth spread. Does anyone know the difference between *Bravo* and *Brava*? (Use *Bravo* when addressing a male performer, *Brava* for female.)

### AT A LATER TIME

- Read a picture book that tells the story of the Nutcracker such as *The Nutcracker* by Susan Jeffers or *Nutcracker* by E.T.A. Hoffmann, illustrated by Maurice Sendak.
- View a live or video performance of *The Nutcracker*. You may wish to begin Activity #3 first so students can be practicing their audience skills as they view the performance.
- Invite students to make their own Nutcracker paper dolls. Give each student a piece of card stock about 2.75" x 8.5" (a letter-size sheet cut into quarters crosswise will work) or duplicate the template below. Display a variety of images of the nutcracker doll from *Nutcracker Night*, other picture books, real nutcrackers, and/or online images. Students can be guided by these as they create their own original paper dolls. Provide felt markers for maximum vibrancy as they color in their creations. Encourage students to use their paper dolls in imaginative play during their free time.



## ACTIVITY 1: THAT SOUNDS LIKE A STORY!

Personal narratives are one of the first text forms students write. Often, they consist of a series of phrases joined together by "...and then we...". *Nutcracker Night* inspires a fresh new way to write personal narratives that even first-graders can try.

### Learning Expectations

Students will:

- generate ideas about a potential topic using a variety of strategies and resources
- identify and order main ideas and supporting details, initially with support and direction, using simple graphic organizers
- write short texts using a few simple forms (e.g., a recount of personally significant experiences)
- write simple but complete sentences that make sense
- use some appropriate elements of effective presentation in the finished product, such as print, different fonts, graphics, and layout
- *Optional*: produce media texts for specific purposes and audiences, using a few simple media forms and appropriate conventions and techniques (e.g., a selection of background music and sound effects to accompany a picture book that will be read aloud to the class)

### You Will Need

- *Nutcracker Night* and some other picture books containing onomatopoeia (e.g. *Giraffe and Bird* by Rebecca Bender or *Honey...Honey...Lion* by Jan Brett)
- chart paper and markers
- handmade booklets made of several sheets of folded paper
- writing and coloring tools
- blackline master "Narrative Organizer Sheet" (included below), one copy per student

### How To:

1. Explain that *onomatopoeia* refers to words that sound like the noise they describe. With your students, read through *Nutcracker Night* again, this time identifying all the onomatopoeia and recording them on a chart.
2. Read some other books that feature onomatopoeia, such as *Giraffe and Bird* by Rebecca Bender (look in the illustrations) or *Honey...Honey...Lion* by Jan Brett. Add any new words you find to your chart. If anyone can think of more sound words, add those to the chart too.
3. Use a gradual release of responsibility model to guide students through the process of writing a personal narrative in the style of *Nutcracker Night*. Begin with a think-aloud: "I want to write a story about something special that I did when I was about your age. I am trying to decide which one to choose. There was the time I visited my uncle's farm. Or the time my mom took us camping. Or the time we went to see the fireworks." Try to include things most of your students might have done. On an enlarged copy of the narrative organizer sheet (included below), write a word for your event at the top (e.g. Farm, Camping, or Fireworks).



4. Invite students to close their eyes and imagine what they might hear as you describe the series of events, beginning as you left your home. “We got in the car. What do you hear?” (slam, slam) “We drove a long way.” (brrrrrrm, brrrrrrm) “We drove into a gravel campsite.” (crunch, crunch) etc. Model the act of referring to the onomatopoeia chart for ideas. Record these ideas on your narrative organizer sheet as you go. For example:

**Topic:** *camping*

Sound	What Made the Sound
<b>Beginning (getting there)</b>	
slam	car doors
brrrrrrm	car engine
crunch	tires on gravel
<b>Middle (being there)</b>	
swish, pop	tent going up
chirp	squirrels scolding
crackle	campfire
sizzle	hot dog on a stick
mmm	my mouth
zzzzzzzip!	the zipper on my sleeping bag
whooooo	an owl in the night
<b>End (the experience is over)</b>	
flap	the birds waving goodbye

5. In a handmade booklet of several large sheets of paper folded together, begin translating the narrative organizer sheet into sentences. Write one sentence per page, on the left sheet. Leave the right sheet blank for illustrations later. Use different fonts for the sounds and the other words. For example, use a marker for the sounds and a crayon for the remaining words. On the first page, you might write, “**Slam, slam** go the car doors.” Invite students to help with the remaining pages, first with the ideas and later with the actual writing. It’s not necessary to complete the entire book with the students. You might want to leave it incomplete so that if a small group of students needs extra help later, you can work with them to continue the story. Later, on your own time, draw the first couple of illustrations on the right-hand pages. Place your book at an independent learning center where early finishers can work on the remaining illustrations in their free time.
6. Use think-pair-share to allow students to come up with ideas for their own stories, based on an actual experience they have had. Give them each a narrative organizer sheet on which to record their ideas. Encourage them to make use of the onomatopoeia chart. If they get stuck, encourage peer conferences to help fill in any gaps. If necessary, make suggestions yourself based on the child’s topic, guiding the student’s thinking by closing your eyes, getting in the moment, and saying something like, “Okay, we’re sitting in the bleachers waiting for the game to start. What’s going on around us? What can we hear? What is making that sound?” If some students struggle, or their literacy skills limit their ability to complete the task, gather them at a small table and use guided instruction for this step and the next two.
7. Help students correct any spelling issues on their organizer sheets. This will reduce the editing required in their final product. Or you may plan to let the invented spellings stand in the final product. One good reason to let them stand is to provide a snapshot in time of the child’s current writing skill. However, making the corrections can help move their skill along. Decide which is more valuable at that moment.

8. Remind students how you referred to your narrative organizer sheet and translated the words into sentences. Tell them it's their turn to do that now. Point out that they will need to add the word "go" or "goes" and perhaps another word to join the item from the first column with the item from the second (e.g. Brrrrm, brrrrm goes the car engine"). Post the words "go" and "goes" to avoid misspellings because these are high-frequency words students should learn early. Give them hand-made booklets like the one you modelled with. Remind them to check the spelling corrections on their organizer sheets as they go (if applicable), and to write just one sentence on each left page. They can illustrate as they go or do all the writing first.
9. Provide a way for students to share their finished books. Options include allowing each author to read aloud to the class or to a younger or older reading buddy, or displaying them in a public area of the school.
10. *Optional extension:* Allow students to produce a media work by typing or photographing their story onto a tablet or similar device and adding sound effects to match their onomatopoeia.



## ACTIVITY 2: COMPOSERS: INSPIRING AND ASPIRING

Students will learn about the musical composer of *The Nutcracker* and have the opportunity to become composers themselves.

### Learning Expectations

Students will:

- identify a variety of musical pieces from different cultures through performing and/or listening to them
- express initial reactions and personal responses to musical performances in a variety of ways
- explore the elements of music (timbre, melody, dynamics)
- create compositions for a specific purpose and a familiar audience

### You Will Need

- A recording of at least part of *The Nutcracker Suite*
- Glockenspiel, xylophone, or electronic devices with piano app
- *optional:* internet access
- chart paper and markers
- pencils and paper
- a variety of rhythm instruments, ideally including tuned percussion such as xylophones

### How To:

1. Explain to students that the performance described in *Nutcracker Night* is a real ballet, called *The Nutcracker*. It was first performed in Russia more than 100 years ago, and is now performed all over the world. The music was written by Russian composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky.
2. Play a recording (or video recording) of part of *The Nutcracker Suite* for students to listen to. "Dance of the Sugarplum Fairy" is a great choice because it is unique and recognizable. Help students identify some of the instruments they hear. Of particular interest is the celeste, invented in 1886. Tchaikovsky is believed to be the first major composer to include



this instrument, which creates the iconic bell-like sounds in the “Dance of the Sugarplum Fairy”. It looks like a small piano but sounds more like a glockenspiel or xylophone. Allow students to express their personal reactions through discussion, drawing, or moving to the music.

3. Bring a glockenspiel or even a toy xylophone into the classroom for students to try. One with an upper rack of sharp keys will allow you to actually play the simple melody that is the iconic sugar plum fairy’s theme. Another option is to provide electronic devices with a keyboard app on which students can play the melody. The music is public domain, so PDFs of the sheet music and easy piano tutorials for “Dance of the Sugarplum Fairy” exist online. One example is found here (the aforementioned melody begins at 0:17):  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A\\_AXxYUuBlw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_AXxYUuBlw)
4. Turn to the tenth spread of *Nutcracker Night*. Invite students to recall your earlier discussion around how the words are meant to be read, and how the author communicated that to us. Tell students that there is a symbol used in music which communicates the same idea. Write the words Bong! Bong! Bong! on chart paper and draw a crescendo sign around them:



Then draw another crescendo sign without the words. Explain that when we see this sign in music, we know we are supposed to get louder and louder, just as if there were words inside. If appropriate to your grade level, you could also make a connection to the math concept of greater and less than. Just as the bigger sound is at the wider end of the crescendo sign, the bigger number is at the wider end of the < or > sign.

5. Invite students to create a musical composition which includes a simple 3–5 note melody (if tuned instruments are available), a variety of timbres (more than one percussion instrument), and a change in dynamics (shown by a crescendo or decrescendo/diminuendo sign). Encourage

them to create a notation for their composition that is meaningful to them and reminds them what to play when. Have them perform their composition for the class. You may wish to begin Activity #3 first, so students can be practicing their audience skills as their peers perform.

6. *Extra:* If tuned instruments (e.g. xylophone, piano, etc) are not available, one can be imitated using a series of drinking glasses containing increasing amounts of water. For the handy educator, a set of tuned chimes can be made using a series of increasing lengths of copper pipe suspended from a wooden frame. Or use a wind chime that has tuned metal tubes.

## ACTIVITY 3: SHOWING OUR APPRECIATION

*Nutcracker Night* provides a great introduction to audience skills for young children.

### Learning Expectations

Students will:

- identify and give examples of their strengths, interests, and areas for improvement as drama participants and audience members
- demonstrate an understanding of appropriate listening behavior by using active listening strategies

### You Will Need

- *Nutcracker Night*
- chart paper and markers

### How To:

1. Prepare a t-chart with one column to record expected audience behaviors and one column to record the reasons for these behaviors.
2. Ask students if they know how people are expected to behave when they are part of an audience. Tell them there are some clues in *Nutcracker Night* and you want them to be detectives and notice them as you re-read the book. Invite them to raise their hands when they hear or see a good audience behavior (e.g. clapping when the conductor enters, being

very quiet, as when the parents hush the children, responding with our emotions as on the “Aww, sigh...Hooray!” page, releasing our wiggles and chatter during intermission, returning to our seats on the signal, saying “Bravo!”). Add any additional audience behaviors you would like your students to follow, (e.g clapping at the end and after any musical numbers, clapping during the curtain call and/or giving a standing ovation, using the washroom just prior to the performance to avoid interruptions during the performance, keeping the theater seat flat and remaining seated on it to avoid blocking the view of people behind you, etc.). Discuss reasons for each expectation, focusing on showing respect for the performers who have worked so hard to prepare for your enjoyment, showing respect for the other audience members who have (probably) paid money and deserve to enjoy the show, and for the students’ own enjoyment and learning.

3. Post the chart and remind students of these expectations each time they are going to be an audience: at story time, when a peer is presenting their musical composition from Activity 2, when you view a video performance of *The Nutcracker* in the classroom, and when you take them to see a live performance.
4. Prepare a self-assessment sheet containing some of the expectations from your chart. Have students assess their own audience skills after each informal and formal performance. This can be done verbally or with pictures for pre-readers.



## ACTIVITY 3: NUTCRACKER’S TRAVELS

This activity traces the geographical and cultural origins and current locations of *The Nutcracker* ballet.

### Learning Expectations

Students will:

- demonstrate an understanding of simple chronology by identifying and organizing chronologically some important events
- compare some significant traditions and celebrations among diverse groups and at different times, and identify some of the reasons for changes in these traditions/celebrations
- analyze and construct simple maps as part of their investigations into past and present traditions and celebrations
- identify some ways in which heritage is passed on through various family celebrations and practices
- compare selected communities from around the world

### You Will Need

- *Nutcracker Night*
- a long strip of paper on which to create a timeline
- internet access
- a world map
- approximately 20 copies of a small (1” x 2”) image of a nutcracker doll

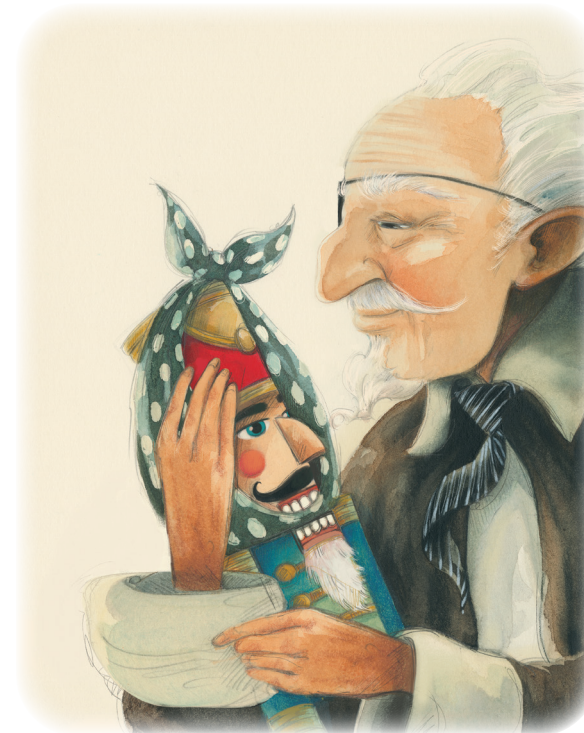
### How To:

1. Read the background information about *The Nutcracker* found on the last page of *Nutcracker Night*.
2. Together with students, create a timeline of the history of *The Nutcracker*. Begin with the information on that page: place a dot on the timeline, not quite at the beginning, labelled “*The Nutcracker* ballet first performed in St. Petersburg, Russia, 1892.”
3. With your students, research the origins of the story: *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, by German author E.T.A. Hoffmann who lived in



Konigsberg, Prussia, (now in Kaliningrad Oblast, an exclave of Russia), in 1816, and the adaptation by French writer Alexandre Dumas, called *The Story of a Nutcracker* in 1844. Add these two events to your timeline.

4. Next, research and add significant performances through the decades (e.g. first abridged performance outside Russia in Budapest, 1927, first complete performance outside Russia in England 1934, an abridged version performed in New York City in 1940, annual Christmas performances across the USA began in the 1960's). Find and note the nearest location to your school that holds annual performances.
5. Research and add to the timeline a few of the film and television adaptations that might be significant to your students, such as George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker* (1993), which you may be able to purchase online, but be sure to check public viewing permission requirements.
6. On a world map, locate the places mentioned on your timeline. Find an image of a nutcracker doll (free clipart of such an image is widely available online). Make about 20 copies of the same image, about 1" x 2" in size. On each image, use a bold marker to write one of the significant dates and attach the image to the corresponding place on the world map. For example, write "1816" on an image and attach it to the map over Kaliningrad (on the Baltic Sea). Write "1844" on another image and attach it over France. When the map is complete, up to a modern-day performance in a city near you, place the map where students can touch it. Invite them to go to it during their free time and use their finger to trace the route the Nutcracker has taken from Prussia so long ago, to a nearby theatre this coming holiday season. This is both a math and a social studies activity, as students search for increasing date numbers while tracing the distance involved in a global journey.
7. Explore the climate and culture of some of the places in *The Nutcracker's* travels, including various ways people in those places celebrate midwinter holidays. Allow opportunities for students to share their own traditions and celebrations.



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## Bibliography

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/language/18currb.pdf>

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/social-studies-history-geography-2018.pdf>

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/arts/18b09curr.pdf>

# Narrative Organizer Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Sound	What Made the Sound
Beginning (getting there)	
Middle (being there)	
End (the experience is over)	

# Nutcracker Paper Doll

hat

face

jacket

pants

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